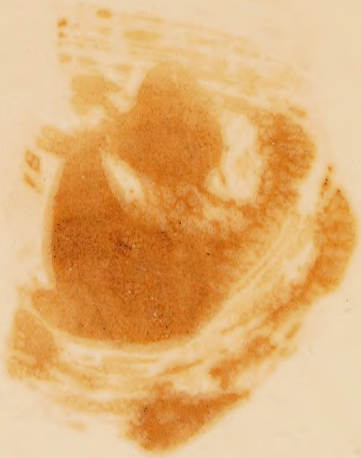
CANDLE-LIGHTIN' TIME

PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR



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Candle-Lightin' Time

by

Paul Laurence Dunbar

Illustrated with Photographs
by the
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and decorations by
Margaret Armstrong

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To
My Friend Mrs. Fitzgerald

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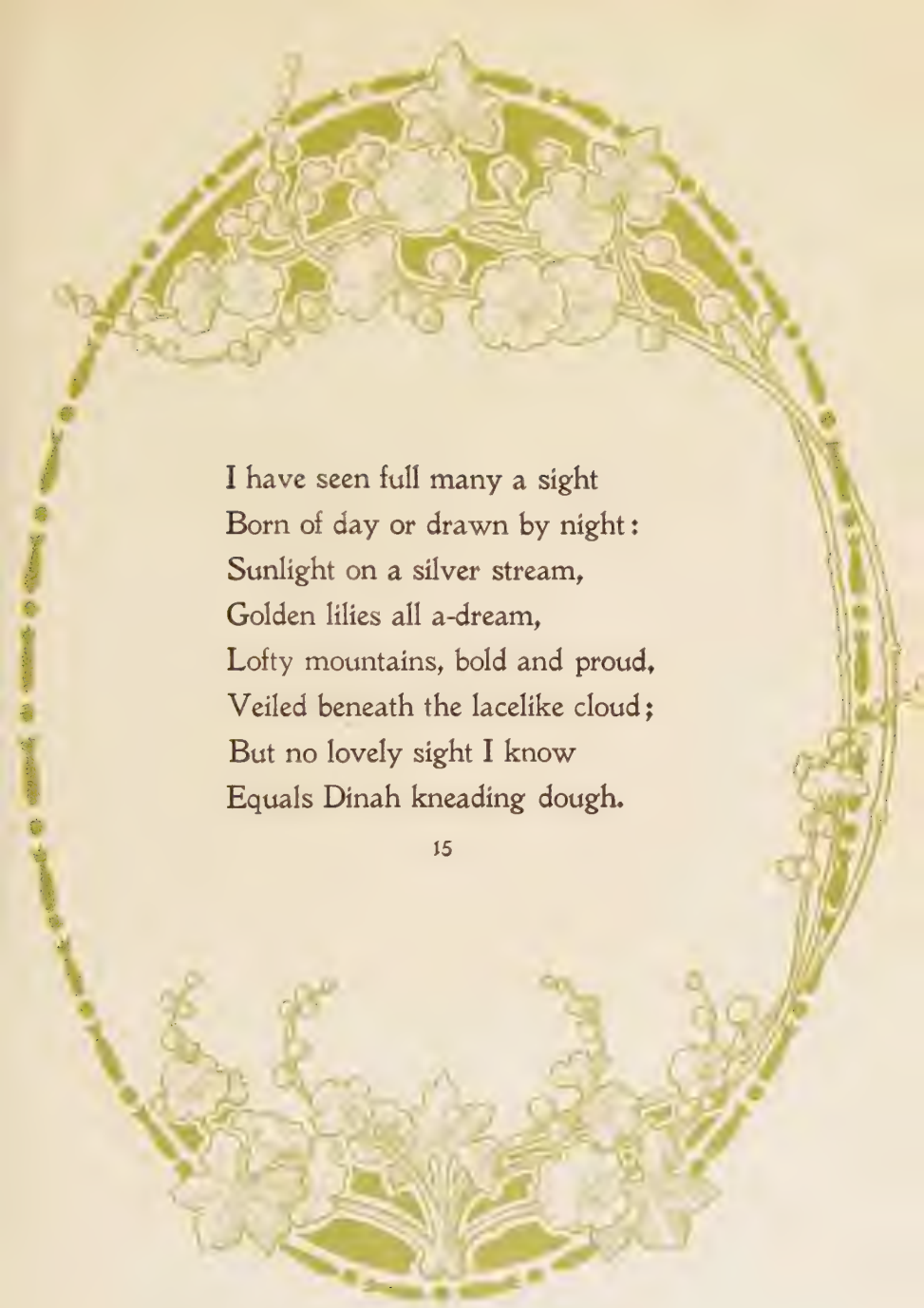
Dinah
kneading
Dough



I have seen full many a sight
Born of day or drawn by night:
Sunlight on a silver stream,
Golden lilies all a-dream,
Lofty mountains, bold and proud,
Veiled beneath the lacelike cloud;
But no lovely sight I know
Equals Dinah kneading dough.

Brown arms buried elbow-deep
Their domestic rhythm keep,
As with steady sweep they go
Through the gently yielding dough.
Maids may vaunt their finer charms —
Naught to me like Dinah's arms;
Girls may draw, or paint, or sew —
I love Dinah kneading dough.

Eyes of jet and teeth of pearl,
Hair, some say, too tight a-curl;
But the dainty maid I deem
Very near perfection's dream.
Swift she works, and only flings
Me a glance — the least of things.
And I wonder, does she know
That my heart is in the dough?

DAT OL' MARE O' MINE

Want to trade me, do you, mistah? Oh, well, now,
I reckon not.
W'y, you could n't buy my Sukey fu' a thousan' on
de spot.
Dat ol' mare o' mine?
Yes, huh coat ah long an' shaggy, an' she ain't no
shakes to see;
Dat 's a ring-bone, yes, you right, suh, an' she got a
on'ry knee,
But dey ain't no use in talkin', she de only hoss
fu' me,
Dat ol' mare o' mine.

C'ose, I knows dat Suke 's contra'y, an' she moughty
ap' to vex;
But you got to mek erlowance fu' de nature of huh
sex;
Dat ol' mare o' mine.
Ef you pull her on de lef' han', she plum 'termined
to go right,
A cannon could n't skeer huh, but she boun' to tek
a fright
At a piece o' common paper, or anyt'ing dat 's
white,
Dat ol' mare o' mine.

W'en my eyes commence to fail me, dough, I trus'es to huh sight,
An' she 'll tote me safe an' hones' on de ve'y da'kes' night,
Dat ol' mare o' mine.
Ef I whup huh, she 'll jes' switch huh tail, an' settle to a walk,
Ef I whup huh mo', she 'll shek huh haid, an' lak ez not, she 'll balk.
But huh sense ain't no ways lackin', she do evah-t'ing but talk,
Dat ol' mare o' mine.

But she gentle ez a lady w'en she know huh beau
kin see,
An' she sholy got mo' gumption any day den you
or me,
Dat ol' mare o' mine.
She 's a leetle slow a-goin', an' she moughty ha'd
to sta't,
But we's gittin' ol' togathah, an' she 's closah to
my hea't,
An' I does n' reckon, mistah, dat she 'd scarcely keer
to pa't,
Dat ol' mare o' mine.

W'y, I knows de time dat cidah 's kin' o' muddled
up my haid,
Ef it had n't been fu' Sukey hyeah, I reckon I 'd
been daid;
Dat ol' mare o' mine.
But she got me in de middle o' de road an' tuk me
home,
An' she would n't let me wandah, ner she would n't
let me roam,
Dat 's de kin' o' hoss to tie to w'en you 's seed de
cidah's foam,
Dat ol' mare o' mine.

You kin talk erbout yo' heaven, you kin talk erbout yo' hell,
Dey is people, dey is hosses, den dey 's cattle, den dey 's — well, —
Dat ol' mare o' mine;
She de beatenes' t'ing dat evah struck de medders o' de town,
An' dough huh haid ain't fittin' fu' to waih no golden crown,
D' ain't a blessed way fu' Petah fu' to tu'n my Sukey down,
Dat ol' mare o' mine.

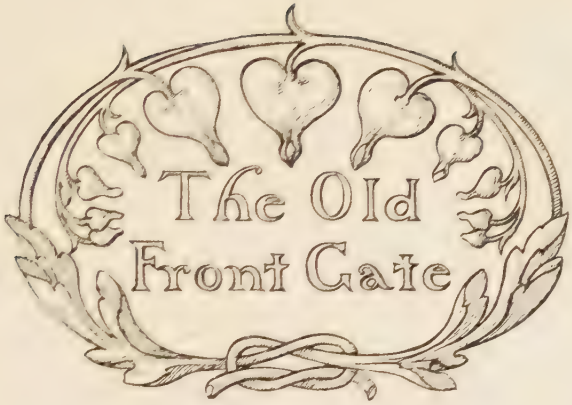
A Spring Wooing

Come on walkin' wid me, Lucy; 't ain't no time to mope erroun'
W'en de sunshine 's shoutin' glory in de sky,
An' de little Johnny-Jump-Ups jes' a-springin' f'om de groun',
Den a-lookin' roun' to ax each othah w'y.
Don' you hyeah dem cows a-mooin'? Dat 's dey howdy to de spring;
Ain' dey lookin' most oncommon satisfied?
Hit 's enough to mek a body want to spread dey mouf an' sing
Jes' to see de critters all so spa'klin'-eyed.

W'y, dat squir'l dat jes' run past us, ef I didn' know his tricks,
I could swaih he 'd got 'uligion jes' to-day;
An' dem liza'ds slippin' back an' fofe ermong de stones an' sticks
Is a-wigglin' 'cause dey feel so awful gay.
Oh, I see yo' eyes a-shinin' dough you try to mek me b'lieve
Dat you ain' so monst'ous happy 'cause you come;
But I tell you dis hyeah weathah meks it moughty ha'd to 'ceive
Ef a body's soul ain' blin' an' deef an' dumb.

Robin whistlin' ovah yandah ez he buil' his little nes';
Whut you reckon dat he sayin' to his mate?
He 's a-sayin' dat he love huh in de wo'ds she know de bes',
An' she lookin' moughty pleased at whut he state.
Now, Miss Lucy, dat ah robin sholy got his sheer o' sense,
An' de hen-bird got huh mothah-wit fu' true;
So I t'ink ef you 'll excuse me, fu' I do' mean no erfense,
Dey 's a lesson in dem birds fu' me an' you.

I 's a-buil'in' o' my cabin an' I 's vines erbove de do'
Fu' to kin' o' gin it sheltah f'om de sun ;
Gwine to have a little kitchen wid a reg'lar wooden flo',
An' dey 'll be a back verandy w'en hit 's done.
I 's a-waitin' fu' you, Lucy, tek de 'zample o' de birds,
Dat 's a-lovin' an' a-matin' evahwhaih.
I cain' tell you dat I loves you in de robin's music wo'ds,
But my cabin 's talkin' fu' me ovah thaih !


The Old
Front Gate

W'en daih 's chillun in de house,
Dey keep on a-gittin' tall;
But de folks don' seem to see
Dat dey 's growin' up at all,
Twell dey fin' out some fine day
Dat de gals has 'menced to grow,
W'en dey notice as dey pass
Dat de front gate 's saggin' low.

W'en de hinges creak an' cry,
An' de bahs go slantin' down,
You kin reckon dat hit 's time
Fu' to cas' yo' eye erroun',
'Cause daih ain' no 'sputin' dis,
Hit 's de trues' sign to show,
Dat daih 's cou'tin' goin' on
W'en de ol' front gate sags low.

Oh, you grumble an' complain,
An' you prop dat gate up right;
But you notice right nex' day
Dat hit 's in de same ol' plight.
So you fin' dat hit 's a rule,
An' daih ain' no use to blow,
W'en de gals is growin' up,
Dat de front gate will sag low.

Den you' t'ink o' yo' young days,
W'en yo' cou'ted Sally Jane,
An' you so't o' feel ashamed
Fu' to grumble an' complain,
'Cause you' ricerlection says,
An' you know hits wo'ds is so,
Dat huh pappy had a time
Wid his front gate saggin' low.

So you jes' looks on an' smiles
At 'em leanin' on de gate,
Try'n' to t'ink whut he kin say
Fu' to keep him daih so late.
But you lets dat gate erlone,
Fu' yo' 'sperunce go to show
Twell de gals is ma'ied off
It gwine keep on saggin' low.

FISHIN'

W'en I git up in de mo'nin' an' de clouds is big
an' black,
Dey 's a kin' o' wa'nin' shivah goes a-scootin'
down my back;
Den I says to my ol' ooman ez I watches down
de lane,
"Don't you so't o' reckon, Lizy, dat we gwine
to have some rain?"

"Go on, man," my Lizy answah, "you cain't
fool me, not a bit,
I don't see no rain a-comin', ef you 's wishin' fu'
it, quit,
Case de mo' you t'ink erbout it, an' de mo' you
pray an' wish,
W'y, de rain stay 'way de longah, spechul ef
you wants to fish."

But I see huh pat de skillet, an' I see huh cas' huh eye
Wid a kin' o' anxious motion to'ds de da'kness in de sky;
An' I knows whut she 's a-t'inkin', 'dough she tries so ha'd to hide,
She 's a-sayin', "Would n't catfish now tas'e mons'tous bully, fried?"

Den de clouds git black an' blackah, an' de thundah 'mence to roll,
An' de rain, hit 'mence a-fallin', oh, I 's happy, bless my soul!
Ez I look at dat ol' skillet, an' I 'magine I kin see
Jes a slew o' new-ketched catfish sizzlin' daih fu' huh an' me.

'T ain't no use to go a-ploughin', fu' de groun 'll
be too wet.
So I puts out fu' de big house at a moughty
pace, you bet,
An' ol' mastah say, "Well, Lishy, ef you think
hit 's gwine to rain,
Go on fishin', hit 's de weathah, an' I 'low we
cain't complain."

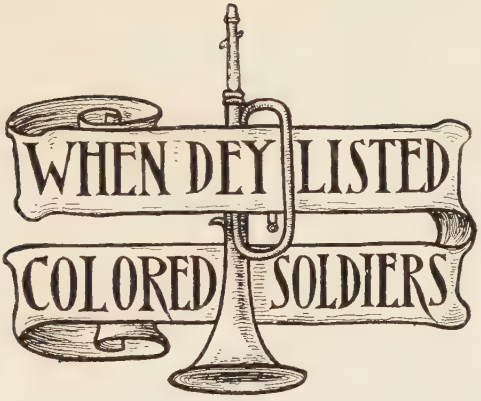
Talk erbout a dahky walkin' wid his haid up
in de aih!
Have to feel mine evah minute to be sho' I got it
daih;
Fu' de win' is cuttin' capahs an a-lashin' thoo de
trees,
But de rain keeps on a-singin' blessid songs,
lak "Tek yo' ease."

Wid my pole erpon my shouldah an' my wo'm-
can in my han',
I kin feel de fish a-waitin' w'en I strikes de
rivah's san';
Nevah min', you ho'ny scoun'els, need n' swim
erroun' an' grin,
I 'll be grinnin' in a minute w'en I 'mence to
haul you in.

W'en de fish begin to nibble, an' de co'k begin
to jump,
I 's erfeared dey 'll quit dey bitin', case dey hyeah
my hea't go "thump"
Twell de co'k go way down undah, an' I raise
a awful shout,
Ez a big ol' yallah belly comes a-gallivantin' out.

Need n't wriggle, Mistah Catfish, case I got you
jes de same,
You been eatin', I 'll be eatin', an' we needer ain't
to blame.
But you need n't feel so lonesome fu' I 's throwin'
out to see
Ef dey ain't some of yo' comerds fu' to keep you
company.

Spo't ? dis fishin'! now you talkin', w'y, dey
ain't no kin' to beat ;
I do' keer ef I is soakin', laigs, an' back, an' naik,
an' feet,
It 's de spo't I 's lookin' aftah. Hit 's de pleasure
an' de fun,
Dough I knows dat Lizy's waitin' wid de skillet
w'en I 's done.


WHEN DEY LISTED
COLORED SOLDIERS

Dey was talkin' in de cabin, dey was talkin' in de hall;
But I listened kin' o' keerless, not a-thinkin' 'bout it all;
An' on Sunday, too, I noticed, dey was whisp'rin' mighty much,
Stan'in' all erroun' de roadside w'en dey let us out o' chu'ch.
But I did n't think erbout it twell de middle of de week,
An' my 'Lias come to see me, an' somehow he could n't speak.
Den I seed all in a minute whut he 'd come to see me for; —
Dey had 'listed colo'ed sojers, an' my 'Lias gwine to wah.

Oh, I hugged him, an' I kissed him, an' I baiged
him not to go;
But he tol' me dat his conscience, hit was callin'
to him so,
An' he could n't baih to lingah w'en he had a
chanst to fight
For de freedom dey had gin him an' de glory of
de right.
So he kissed me, an' he lef' me, w'en I 'd p'omised
to be true;
An' dey put a knapsack on him, an' a coat all
colo'ed blue.
So I gin him pap's ol' Bible, f'om de bottom of de
draw', —
W'en dey 'listed colo'ed sojers an' my 'Lias went
to wah.

But I thought of all de weary miles dat he would
have to tramp,
An' I could n't be contented w'en dey tuk him to
de camp.
W'y, my hea't nigh broke wid grievin' twell I
seed him on de street;
Den I felt lak I could go an' th'ow my body at his
feet.
For his buttons was a-shinin', an' his face was
shinin', too,
An' he looked so strong an' mighty in his coat
o' sojer blue,
Dat I hollahed, "Step up, manny," dough my
th'oat was so' an' raw, —
W'en dey 'listed colo'ed sojers an' my 'Lias went
to wah.

Ol' Mis' cried w'en mastah lef' huh, young Miss
mou'ned huh brothah Ned,
An' I did n't know dey feelin's is de ve'y wo'ds
dey said
W'en I tol' 'em I was so'y. Dey had done gin
up dey all;
But dey only seemed mo' proudah dat dey men
had heerd de call.
Bofe my mastahs went in gray suits, an' I loved
de Yankee blue,
But I t'ought dat I could sorrer for de losin' of
'em too;
But I could n't, for I did n't know de ha'f o' whut
I saw,
Twell dey 'listed colo'ed sojers an' my 'Lias went
to wah.

Mastah Jack come home all sickly; he was broke
for life, dey said;
An' dey lef' my po' young mastah some'rs on de
roadside, — dead.
W'en de women cried an' mou'ned 'em, I could
feel it thoo an' thoo,
For I had a loved un fightin' in de way o' dan-
gah, too.
Den dey tol' me dey had laid him some'rs way
down souf to res',
Wid de flag dat he had fit for shinin' daih acrost
his breas'.
Well, I cried, but den I reckon dat 's what Gawd
had called him for
W'en dey 'listed colo'ed sojers an' my 'Lias went
to wah.

LVLLABY

Kiver up yo' haid, my little lady,
Hyeah de win' a-blowin' out o' do's.
Don' you kick, ner projick wid de comfo't,
Less'n fros'll bite yo' little toes.
Shut yo' eyes, an' snuggle up to mammy;
Gi' me bofe yo' han's, I hol' 'em tight;
Don' you be afeard, an' 'mence to trimble
Des ez soon ez I blows out de light.

Angels is a-mindin' you, my baby,
  Keepin' off de Bad Man in de night.
Whut de use o' bein' skeered o' nuffin'?
  You don' fink de da'kness gwine to bite?
Whut de crackin' soun' you hyeah erroun' you?—
  Lawsy, chile, you tickles me to def!—
Dat 's de man what brings de fros', a-paintin'
  Picters on de winder wid his bref.

Mammy ain' afeard, you hyeah huh laffin'?
Go' way, Mistah Fros', you can't come in;
Baby ain' erceivin' folks dis evenin',
Reckon dat you 'll have to call ag'in.
Curl yo' little toes up so, my possum —
Umph, but you 's a cunnin' one fu' true! —
Go to sleep, de angels is a-watchin',
An' yo' mammy 's mindin' of you, too.

SONG OF SVMMER

Dis is gospel weathah, sho' —
Hills is sawt o' hazy.
Meddahs level ez a flo'
Callin' to de lazy.
Sky all white wif streaks o' blue,
Sunshine softly gleamin',
D'ain't no wuk hit 's right to do,
Nothin' 's right but dreamin'.

Dreamin' by de rivah side
Wif de watahs glist'nin',
Feelin' good an' satisfied
Ez you lay a-list'nin'
To the little nakid boys
Splashin' in de watah,
Hollerin' fu' to spress deir joys
Jes' lak youngsters ought to.

Squir'l a-tippin' on his toes,
So 's to hide an' view you;
Whole flocks o' camp-meetin' crows
Shoutin' hallelujah.
Peckahwood erpon de tree
Tappin' lak a hammah;
Jaybird chattin' wif a bee,
Tryin' to teach him grammah.

Breeze is blowin' wif perfume,
Jes' enough to tease you;
Hollyhocks is all in bloom,
Smellin' fu' to please you.
Go 'way, folks, an' let me 'lone,
Times is gettin' dearah —
Summah 's settin' on de th'one,
An' I'm a-layin' neah huh !

AT
CANDLE LIGHTIN'
TIME

When I come in f'om de co'n-fiel' aftah wo'kin' ha'd all day,
It 's amazin' nice to fin' my suppah all erpon de way;
An' it 's nice to smell de coffee bubblin' ovah in de pot,
An' it 's fine to see de meat a-sizzlin' teasin'-lak an' hot.

But when suppah-time is ovah, an' de t'ings is cleahed away;
Den de happy hours dat foller are de sweetes' of de day.
When my co'ncob pipe is sta'ted, an' de smoke is drawin' prime,
My ole 'ooman says, "I reckon, Ike, it's candle-lightin' time."

Den de chillun snuggle up to me, an' all commence
to call,
"Oh, say, daddy, now it's time to mek de shadders
on de wall."
So I puts my han's togethah, — evah daddy knows
de way, —
An' de chillun snuggle closer roun' ez I begin to say: —

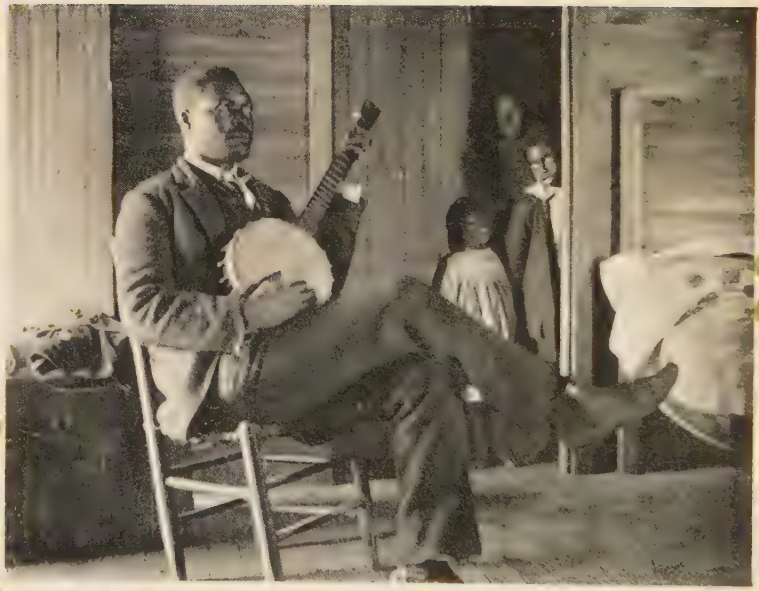
"Fus' thing, hyeah come Mistah Rabbit; don' you see him wo'k his eahs?

Huh, uh! dis mus' be a donkey, — look, how innercent he 'pears!

Dah 's de ole black swan a-swimmin' — ain't she got a' awful neck?

Who 's dis feller dat 's a-comin'? Why, dat 's ole dog Tray, I 'spec'!"

Dat 's de way I run on, tryin' fu' to please 'em all
I can;
Den I hollahs, "Now be keerful — dis hyeah las' 's
de buga-man!"
An' dey runs an' hides dey faces; dey ain't skeered
— dey 's lettin' on:
But de play ain't raaly ovah twell dat buga-man is
gone.



So I jes' teks up my banjo, an' I plays a little chune,
An' you see dem haids come peepin' out to listen
mighty soon.
Den my wife says, "Sich a pappy fu' to give you
sich a fright!
Jes' you go to baid, an' leave him: say yo' prayers
an' say good-night."